

SOWING IN THE WIND—REAPING UNDER CLOUDS

NO. 2264

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”
Ecclesiastes 11:4

SOW when the time comes, whatever wind blows. Reap when the times comes, whatever clouds are in the sky! There are however, qualifying proverbs which must influence our actions. We are not to discard prudence in the choice of the time for our work. “To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” It is well to sow when the weather is propitious. It is wise to “make hay while the sun shines.” Cut your corn when there is the probability of getting it in dry.

But Solomon here is pushing the other side of the matter. He had seen prudence turn to idleness. He had noticed some people wait for a more convenient season which never came. He had observed sluggards making excuses which did not hold water. So he, with a blunt word, generalizes, in order to make the truth more forcible. Not troubling about the exceptions to the rule, he states it broadly thus—“Take no notice of winds or clouds. Go on with your work whatever happens. ‘He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.’”

I. The first thought that is suggested by these words is this, **NATURAL DIFFICULTIES MAY BE UNDULY CONSIDERED.**

A man may observe the wind and regard the clouds a great deal too much, and so neither sow nor reap.

Note here first, that *in any work this would hinder a man*. In any labor to which we set our hands, if we take too much notice of the difficulties, we shall be hindered in it. It is very wise to know the difficulty of your calling, the sorrow which comes with it, the trial which arises out of it, the temptation connected therewith, but if you think too much of these things, there is no calling that will be carried on with any success.

Poor farmers, they have a crop of hay and cannot get it in, they may fret themselves to death if they like, and never earn a penny for a seven years' fretting! We say of their calling that it is surrounded with constant trouble. They may lose everything just at the moment when they are about to gather it in. The seed may perish under the clods when it is first sown. It is subject to blight, and mildew, and bird, and worm, and I know not what besides, and then, at the last, when the farmer is about to reap the harvest, it may disappear before the sickle can cut it.

Take the case of the sailor. If he regards winds and clouds, will he ever be put to sea? Can you give him a promise that the wind will be favorable in any of his voyages, or that he will reach his desired haven without a tempest? He that observeth the winds will not sail, and he that regardeth the clouds will never cross the mighty deep.

If you turn from the farmer and the sailor, and come to the trader, what tradesman will do anything if he is always worrying about the competition, and about the difficulties of his trade which is so cut up that there is no making a living by it? I have heard this, I think, about every trade, and yet our friends keep on living, and some of them get rich, when they are supposed to be losing money every year! He that regardeth the rise and fall of prices and is timid, and will do no trading because of the changes on the market, will not reap.

If you come to the working man, it is the same as with those I have mentioned, for there is no calling or occupation that is not surrounded with difficulties. In fact, I have formed this judgment from what friends have told me, that every trade is the worst trade out, for I have found somebody in that particular line who has proved this to a demonstration.

I cannot say that I am an implicit believer in all I hear about this matter. Still, if I were, this would be the conclusion that I should come to, that he that observed the circumstances of any trade or calling, would never engage in it at all, he would never sow, and he would never reap. I suppose he would go to bed and sleep all the four-and-twenty hours of the day, and after a while, I am afraid he would find it become impossible even to do that, and he would learn that to turn, with the sluggard, like a door on its hinges, is not unalloyed pleasure after all.

Well now, dear friends, if there be these difficulties in connection with earthly callings and trades, do you expect there will be nothing of the kind with regard to heavenly things? Do you imagine that, in sowing the good seed of the kingdom, and gathering the sheaves into the garner, you will have no difficulties and disappointments?

Do you dream that when you are bound for heaven, you are to have smooth sailing and propitious winds all the voyage? Do you think that in your heavenly trading, you will have less trials than the merchant who has only to do with earthly business? If you do, you make a great mistake. You will not be likely to enter upon the heavenly calling, if you do nothing else but unduly consider the difficulties surrounding it.

But next, *in the work of liberality this would stop us*. This is Solomon's theme here. "Cast thy bread upon the waters." "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight," and so on. He means, by my text, that if anybody occupies his mind unduly with the difficulties connected with liberality, he will do nothing in that line. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." "How am I to know," says one, "that the person to whom I give my money is really deserving? How do I know what he will do with it? How do I know but what I may be encouraging idleness or begging? By giving to the man, I may be doing him real injury."

Perhaps you are not asked to give to an individual, but to some great work. Then, if you regard the clouds, you will begin to say, "How do I know that this work will be successful, this sending of missionaries to the Khoikhoi? Will any good come of it? Or this sending of missionaries to a cultivated people like the Hindus? Is it likely that they will be converted?" You will not sow, and you will not reap, if you talk like that, yet there are many who do speak in that fashion.

There was never an enterprise started yet but somebody objected to it, and I do not believe that the best work that Christ Himself ever did was beyond criticism, there were some people who were sure to find some fault with it. "But," says another, "I have heard that the management at headquarters is not all it ought to be, I think that there is too much money spent on the secretary, and that there is a great deal lost in this direction and in that."

Well, dear friend, it goes without saying that if *you* managed things, they would be managed perfectly, but you see, you cannot do everything, and therefore you must trust somebody. I can only say, with regard to societies, agencies, works, and missions of all kinds, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." If that is what you are doing, finding out imperfections and difficulties, it will end in this, you will do nothing at all.

Going a little further, as this is true of common occupations and of liberality, so it is especially true *in the work of serving God*. Now, if I were to consider in my mind nothing but the natural depravity of man, I would never preach again. To preach the Gospel to sinners is as foolish a thing as to bid dead men rise out of their graves. For that very reason I do it, because it has pleased God, "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." When I look upon the alienation from God, the hardness of the human heart, I see that old Adam is too strong for me, and if I regarded that one cloud of the fall, and original sin, and the natural depravity of man, I, for one, would neither sow nor reap.

I am afraid that there has been a good deal of this however. Many preachers have contemplated the ruin of man, and they have had so clear a view of it that they dare not say, “Thus saith the LORD, Ye dry bones, live.” They are unable to cry, “Dear Master, speak through us and say, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’” Some seem to say, “Go and see if Lazarus has any kind of feeling of his condition in the grave. If so, I will call him out, because I believe he can come,” thus putting all the burden on Lazarus, and depending upon Lazarus for it.

But we say, “Though he has been dead four days, and is already becoming corrupt, that has nothing to do with us. If our Master bids us call him out from his grave, we can call him out and he will come, not because he can come by his own power, but because God can make him come, for the day now is when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of God, and they that shall hear and shall live.

But dear friends, there are persons to whom we should never go to seek their salvation if we regarded the winds and the clouds, for they are peculiarly bad people. You know from observation, that there are some persons who are much worse than others, some who are not amenable to kindness, or any other human treatment. They do not seem to be terrified by law, or affected by love.

We know people who go into a horrible temper every now and then, and all the hope we had of them is blown away like sere leaves in the autumn wind. You know such, and you “fight shy” with them. There are such boys and there are such girls, full of mischief and levity, or full of malice and bitterness, and you say to yourself, “I cannot do anything with them. It is of no use.” You are observing the winds, and regarding the clouds. You will not be one of those to whom Isaiah says, “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.”

Someone may say, “I would not mind the moral condition of the people, but it is their surroundings that are the trouble. What is the use of trying to save a man while he lives as he does, in such a horrible street, in one room? What is the use of seeking to raise such and such a woman while she is surrounded as she is, with such examples? The very atmosphere seems tainted.” Just so, dear friend, while you observe the winds, and regard the clouds, you will not sow and you will not reap. You will not attempt the work, and of course you will not complete what you do not commence.

So, you know, you can go on making all kinds of excuses for doing nothing with certain people because you feel or think that they are not those whom God is likely to bless. I know this to be a common case, even with very serious and earnest workers for Christ. Let it not be so with you, dear friends, but be you one of those who obey the poet’s words—

*“Beside all waters sow;
The highway furrows stock;
Drop it where thorns and thistles grow;
Scatter it on the rock.”*

Let me carry this principle, however, a little further. You may unduly consider circumstances in reference to *the business of your own eternal life*. You may in that matter observe the winds, and never sow, you may regard the clouds and never reap. “I feel,” says one, “as if I never can be saved. There never was such a sinner as I am. My sins are so peculiarly black.” Yes, and if you keep on regarding them, and do not remember the Savior, and His infinite power to save, you will not sow in prayer and faith.

“Ah, sir, but you do not know the horrible thoughts I have, the dark forebodings that cross my mind!” You are correct, dear friend, I do not know them. I know what I feel myself, and I expect that your feelings are very like my own, but be they what they may, if instead of looking to Christ, you are always studying your own condition, your own withered hopes, your own broken resolutions, then you will still stay where you are, and you will neither sow nor reap.

Beloved Christians, you who have been believers for years, if you begin to live by your frames and feelings, you will get into the same condition. “I do not feel like praying,” says one. Then is the time

when you ought to pray most, for you are evidently most in need, but if you keep observing whether or not you are in the proper frame of mind for prayer, you will not pray.

“I cannot grasp the promises,” says another, “I should like to joy in God and firmly believe in His Word, but I do not see anything in myself that can minister to my comfort.” Suppose you do not. Are you, after all, going to build upon yourself? Are you trying to find your ground of consolation in your own heart? If so, you are on the wrong tack. Our hope is not in self, but in Christ, let us go and sow it. Our hope is in the finished work of Christ, let us go and reap it, for if we keep on regarding the winds and the clouds, we shall neither sow nor reap.

I think it is a great lesson to learn in spiritual things, to believe in Christ and His finished salvation, quite as much as when you are down as when you are up, for Christ is no more Christ on the top of the mountain than He is in the bottom of the valley, and He is no less Christ in the storm at midnight than He is in the sunshine of the day.

Do not begin to measure your safety by your comfort, but measure it by the eternal Word of God which you have believed, and which you know to be true, and on which you rest, for still here, within the little world of our own bosom, “he that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.” We want to get out of that idea altogether.

I have said enough to prove the truth of my first observation, namely, that natural difficulties may be unduly considered.

II. My second observation is this, SUCH CONSIDERATION INVOLVES US IN SEVERAL SINS.

If we keep on observing circumstances instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of *disobedience*. God bids me sow, I do not sow because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap, I do not reap because there is a black cloud there, and before I can house the harvest, some of it may be spoiled. I may say what I like, but I am guilty of disobedience. I have not done what I was bidden to do. I have made an excuse out of the weather, but I have been disobedient.

Dear friends, it is yours to do what God bids you do, whether the heavens fall down or not, and if you knew they would fall, and you could prop them up by disobedience, you have no right to do it. What may happen from our doing right, we have nothing to do with, we are to do right, and take the consequences cheerfully.

Do you want obedience to be always rewarded by a spoonful of sugar? Are you such a baby that you will do nothing unless there shall be some little toy for you directly after? A man in Christ Jesus will do right, though it shall involve him in losses and crosses, slanders and rebukes, yea, even martyrdom itself. May God help you so to do! He that observeth the wind, and does not sow when he is bidden to cast his seed upon the waters, is guilty of disobedience.

Next, we are guilty also of *unbelief* if we cannot sow because of the wind. Who manages the wind? You distrust Him who is Lord of the north, and south, and east, and west. If you cannot reap because of a cloud, you doubt Him who makes the clouds, to whom the clouds are the dust of His feet. Where is your faith? Where is your faith?

“Ah!” says one, “I can serve God when I am helped, when I am moved, when I can see hope of success.” That is poor service, service devoid of faith. May I not say of it, “Without faith it is impossible to please God”? Just in proportion to the quantity of faith that there is in what we do, in that proportion will it be acceptable with God. Observing of winds and clouds is unbelief. We may call it prudence, but unbelief is its true name.

The next sin is *rebellion*. So you will not sow unless God chooses to make the wind blow your way, and you will not reap unless God pleases to drive the clouds away? I call that revolt, rebellion. An honest subject loves his king in all weathers. The true servant serves his master, let his master do what he wills. Oh, dear friends, we are too often aiming at God’s throne! We want to get up there, and manage things—

*“Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge His judgments, be the god of God.”*

“Oh, if He would but alter my circumstances!” What is this but tempting God, as they did in the wilderness, wishing Him to do other than He does? It is wishing Him to do wrong, for what He does is always right, but we must not so rebel, and vex his Holy Spirit by complaining of what He does. Do you not see that this is trying to throw the blame of our shortcomings upon the Lord?

“If we did not sow, do not blame us, God did not send the right wind. If we did not reap, pray not to censure us, how could we be expected to reap while there were clouds in the skies?” What is this but a wicked endeavor to blame God for our own neglect and wrongdoing, and to make divine providence the packhorse upon which we pile our sins? God save us from such rebellion as that!

Another sin of which we are guilty when we are always looking at our circumstances, is *foolish fear*. Though we may think that there is no sin in it, there is great sin in foolish fear. God has commanded His people not to fear, then we should obey Him. There is a cloud, why do you fear it? It will be gone directly, not a drop of rain may fall out of it. You are afraid of the wind, why fear it? It may never come. Even if it were some deadly wind that was approaching, it might shift about and not come near you.

We are often fearing what never happens. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. Many a person has been afraid of what never would occur. It is a great pity to whip yourselves with imaginary rods. Wait till the trouble comes, else I shall have to tell you the story I have often repeated of the mother whose child would cry. She told it not to cry, but it would cry. “Well,” she said, “if you will cry, I will give you something to cry for.” If you get fearing about nothing, the probability is that you will get something really to fear, for God does not love His people to be fools.

There are some who fall into the sin of *penuriousness*. Observe that Solomon was here speaking of liberality. He that observes the clouds and the winds thinks “That is not a good object to help,” and that he will do harm if he gives *here*, or if he gives *there*. It amounts to this, poor miser, you want to save your money! Oh, the ways we have of making buttons with which to secure the safety of our pockets!

Some persons have a button manufactory always ready. They have always a reason for not giving to anything that is proposed to them, or to any poor person who asks their help. I pray that every child of God here may avoid that sin. “Freely ye have received, freely give.” And since you are stewards of a generous Master, let it never be said that the most liberal of Lords has the stingiest of stewards.

Another sin is often that of *idleness*. The man who does not sow because of the wind is usually too lazy to sow, and the man who does not reap because of the clouds, is the man who wants a little more sleep, a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the hands to sleep. If we do not want to serve God, it is full of wonder how many reasons we can find.

According to Solomon, the sluggard said there was a lion in the streets. “There is a lion in the way,” said he, “a lion is in the streets.” What a lie it was, for lions are as much afraid of streets as men are of deserts! Lions do not come into streets. It was idleness that said the lion was there. You were asked to preach the other night and you could preach, but you said, no, you could not preach. However, you attended a political meeting, did you not, and talked twice as long as you would have done if you had preached?

Another friend, asked to teach in Sunday school, said, “I have no gifts of teaching.” Somebody afterwards remarked of you that you had no gifts of teaching, and you felt very vexed, and asked what right had anyone to say that of you? I have heard persons run themselves down when they have been invited to any Christian work, as being altogether disqualified, and when somebody has afterwards said, “That is true, you cannot do anything, I know,” they have looked as if they would knock the speaker down. Oh, yes, yes, yes, we are always making these excuses about winds and clouds, and there is nothing in either of them. It is all meant to save our corn seed, and to save us the trouble of sowing it.

Do you not see that I have made out a long list of sins wrapped up in this observing of winds and clouds? If you have been guilty of any of them, repent of your wrong doing, and do not repeat it.

III. I will not keep you longer over this part of the subject. I will now make a third remark very briefly, LET US PROVE THAT WE HAVE NOT FALLEN INTO THIS EVIL. How can we prove it?

Let us prove it first, *by sowing in the most unlikely places*. What says Solomon? “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” Go, my brothers and sisters, and find the most unlikely people, and begin to work for God with them. Now try if you can, to pick out the worst street in your neighborhood, and visit from house to house, and if there is a man or woman more given up than another, make that person the object of your prayers and of your holy endeavors. Cast your bread upon the waters, then it will be seen that you are trusting God, not trusting the soil, nor trusting the seed.

Next, prove it *by doing good to a great many*. “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight.” Talk of Christ to everybody you meet with. If God has not blessed you to one, try another, and if He has blessed you to one, try two others, and if He has blessed you to two others, try four others, and always keep on enlarging your seed plot as your harvest comes in. If you are doing much, it will be shown that you are not regarding the winds and the clouds.

Further, prove that you are not regarding winds and clouds *by wisely learning from the clouds* another lesson than the one they seem made to teach. Learn this lesson, “If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth,” and say to yourself, “If God has made me full of His grace, I will go and pour it out to others. I know the joy of being saved, if I have had fellowship with Him, I will make a point of being more industrious than ever, because God has been unusually gracious to me. My fullness shall be helpful to others. I will empty myself for the good of others, even as the clouds pour down the rain upon the earth.”

Then, beloved, prove it still *by not wanting to know how God will work*. There is that great mystery of birth, how the human soul comes to inhabit the body of the child, and how the child is fashioned. You know nothing about it, and you cannot know. Therefore do not look about you to see what you cannot understand, and pry into what is concealed from you. Go out and work, go out and preach, go out and instruct others. Go out to seek to win souls. Thus shalt thou prove, in very truth, that thou art not dependent upon surroundings and circumstances.

Again, dear friend, prove this *by consistent diligence*. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.” “Be instant in season, out of season.” I had a friend who had learned the way to put a peculiar meaning upon that passage of Scripture, “Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth.” He thought that the best way was to have money in both pockets, put one hand into each pocket, and then put both hands on the collection plate. I never objected to his interpretation of the passage.

Now, the way to serve Christ is to do all you possibly can, and then as much more. “No,” say you, “that cannot be.” I do not know that it cannot be. I found that the best thing I ever did was a thing I could not do. What I could do well, that was my own, but what I could not do, but still did, in the name and strength of the Eternal JEHOVAH, was the best thing I had done. Beloved, sow in the morning, sow in the evening, sow at night, sow all day long, for you can never tell what God will bless, but by this constant sowing you will prove to demonstration that you are not observing the winds, nor regarding the clouds.

IV. I now come to my concluding observation, LET US KEEP THIS EVIL OUT OF OUR HEARTS AS WELL AS OUT OF OUR WORK.

And first, *let us give no heed to the winds and clouds of doctrine* that are everywhere about us now. Blow, blow, ye stormy winds, but you shall not move me. Clouds of hypotheses and inventions, come up with you, as many as you please, till you darken all the sky, but I will not fear you. Such clouds have come before and have disappeared, and these will disappear too.

If you sit down and think of men’s inventions of error, and their novel doctrines, and how the churches have been bewitched by them, you will get into such a state of mind that you will neither sow nor reap. Just forget them. Give yourself to your holy service as if there were no winds and no clouds, and God will give you such comfort in your soul that you will rejoice before Him, and be confident in His truth.

And then next, *let us not lose hope because of doubts and temptations*. When the clouds and the winds get into your heart, when you do not feel as you used to feel, when you have not that joy and elasticity of spirit you once had, when your ardor seems a little damped and even your faith begins to hesitate a little, go to God all the same. Trust Him still.

*“And when thine eye of faith grows dim,
Still hold to Jesus, sink or swim;
Still at His footstool bow the knee,
And Israel’s God thy strength shall be.”*

Do not go up and down like the mercury in the weather glass, but know what you know, and believe what you believe. Hold to it, and may God keep you in one mind, so that none can turn you, for if not, if you begin to notice these things, you will neither sow nor reap.

Lastly, *let us follow the Lord’s mind, come what will*. In a word, set your face like a flint, to serve God by the maintenance of His truth, by your holy life, by the savor of your Christian character, and that being done, defy earth and hell. If there were a crowd of devils between you and Christ, kick a lane through them by holy faith. They will fly before you. If you have but the courage to make an advance, they cannot stop you. You shall make a clear gangway through legions of them. Only be strong, and of good courage, and do not regard even the clouds from hell, or blasts from the infernal pit, but go straight on in the path of right, and God being with you, you shall sow and you shall reap unto His eternal glory.

Will some poor sinner here tonight, whether he sinks or swims, trust Christ? Come, if you feel less inclined tonight to hope, than ever you did before. Have hope even now, hope against hope, believe against belief. Cast yourself on Christ, even though He may seem to stand with a drawn sword in His hand to run you through, trust even an angry Christ. Though your sins have grieved Him, come and trust Him. Do not stop for winds to blow over, or clouds to burst. Just as you are, without one trace of anything that is good about you, come and trust Christ as your Savior, and you are saved. God give you grace to do so, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ECCLESIASTES 11-12

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11. Verse 1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*

Hoard not your bread, for if you do, it will mildew, it will be of no use to you. Cast it on the waters, scatter it abroad, give it to unworthy men if need be. Some here have seen an allusion to the casting of seed into the Nile when it overflowed its banks. When the waters subsided, the corn would grow and be gathered in “after many days.”

2. *Give a portion to seven,—*

And if that be a perfect number, give beyond it.

2. *And also to eight;*

Give to more than you can afford to give to. Help some who are doubtful, some who are outside of the perfect number, and give them a portion, a fair portion. Our Savior went beyond Solomon, for He said, “Give to every man that asketh of thee.”

2. *For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*

You know not what need there may be of your help, nor what need may come to you, and how you yourself may be helped by those whom you help now.

3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth:*

Some men, the fuller they get, the harder they get, but the clouds are only full that they may empty themselves. Blessed is that steward of God who gets that he may give. “If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.”

3. *And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*

The tree falls the way it is inclined, but when it has fallen, there it must be. God grant that you and I may fall the right way when the axe of death hews us down! Which way are we inclined?

4-5. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

There are great mysteries which we can never comprehend. God alone knows how the soul comes into the body, or even how the body is fashioned. This must remain with Him. We do not know how sinners are regenerated. We know not how the Spirit of God works upon the mind of man, and transforms the sinner into a saint. We do not know.

There are some who know too much already. I have not half the desire to know that I have to believe and to love. Oh, that we loved God more, and trusted God more! We might then get to heaven if we knew even less than we do.

6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

You cannot make the Gospel enter into men’s hearts. You cannot tell how it does enter and change them. The Spirit of God does that, but your duty is to go on telling it out. Go on spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ, in the morning, and in the evening, and all day long, scatter the good seed of the kingdom. You have nothing to do with the result of your sowing, that remains with the Lord. That which you sow in the morning may prosper, or the seed that you scatter in the evening, possibly God will bless both. You are to keep on sowing, whether you reap or not.

7-8. *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.*

Take Christ away and this is a truthful estimate of human life. Put Christ into the question and Solomon does not hit the mark at all. If we have Christ with us, whether the days are light or dark, we walk in the light, and our soul is happy and glad, but apart from Christ, the estimate of life which is given here is an exactly accurate one—a little brightness and long darkness, a flash and then midnight.

God save you from living a merely natural life! May you rise to the supernatural! May you get out of the lower life of the mere animal into the higher life of the regenerated soul! If the life of God be in you, then you shall go from strength to strength, like the sun that shines unto the perfect day.

9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Young man, will you dare then, to follow your passions, and the devices of your own heart, with this at the back, “God will bring thee into judgement”? Oh no, the advice of Solomon apparently so evil, is answered by warning at the end, which is also true,—

10. *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

“Remove sorrow,” or rather, anger, ambition, or anything else that would cause sorrow, “from thy heart; and put away evil from thy flesh.” Let not your fleshly nature rule you, you are in the period when flesh is strong towards evil, when “vanity” is the ruin of many.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12. Verse 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*

Now we get on solid ground. There is an irony in the advice, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes.” There is no irony here, there is solid, sound advice, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” May every young man take this advice, and carry it out!

1-3. While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,—

These arms and hands of ours shake by reason of weakness.

3. And the strong men shall bow themselves,—

These limbs, these legs of ours, begin to bend under the weight they have to support.

3. And the grinders cease because they are few,—

The teeth are gone.

3. And those that look out of the windows be darkened.

The eyesight begins to fail.

4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

The old man sleeps very lightly, anything awakens him. He hides away from public business. The doors are shut in the streets.

5. Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way,—

There is none of the courage of youth. Daring is gone, prudence, not to say cowardice, sits on the throne.

5. And the almond tree shall flourish.

The hair is white and grey, like the early peach or almond tree in the beginning of the year.

5. And the grasshopper shall be a burden,—

A little trouble weighs the old man down. He has no energy now. The grasshopper is a burden.

5-6. And desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl is broken,—

Before the spinal cord is broken, or the skull becomes emptied of the living inhabitants.

6. Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

The circulation of the blood begins to fail, the heart grows weak, it will soon stop. The man's career is nearly over.

7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

This will happen to us all, either to return to dust or else to return to God. Whether we die, and return to dust, or live until the coming of Christ, our spirit shall return to God who gave it. May the return be a joyous one for each of us!

8-11. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads,—

They prick us onward, as the goad does the bullock, when he is trying to stop instead of ploughing in the furrow.

11. And as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

The words of the wise are driven home like nails, and clinched. There is one Shepherd who, by means of His servants' words, leads His flock where He would have them go.

12-13. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the duty of man.

Or “this is the whole of man.” It makes a man of him when he fears God and keeps His commandments, he has that which makes him “the whole man.”

14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Depend upon it that it will be so. At the last great day, there will be a revelation of everything, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Nor need the righteous fear that revelation, for they will only magnify in that day the amazing grace of God which has put all their iniquities away, and then shall all men know how great the grace of God was in passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—748, 747, 753

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